Student-staff partnerships in learning and teaching

Student-staff partnerships in learning and teaching: an overview of current practice and discourse

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Dr Catherine Bovill, Senior Lecturer in Student Engagement, Institute for Academic Development, University of Edinburgh catherine.bovill@ed.ac.uk

Abstract

Student-staff partnerships in learning and teaching are not a new idea, but have seen a growing interest and momentum in recent years. In this article, I provide an overview of the background and context of increased student-staff partnerships, a definition of partnership and some of the benefits. I highlight several examples of practice from different countries, universities and disciplines, and involving different numbers of students, which help to illustrate some of the variety of what is possible in student-staff partnerships in learning and teaching but also some of the challenges. I will focus on key ideas currently being debated in student-staff partnership work in the form of: theoretical framing; contested definitions; mixed motivations and concerns about partnership being co-opted by neoliberalism; the imperative of inclusion; and the role of student-staff relationships. I conclude by considering what ways geographers might contribute to future research and practice, by offering some practical strategies for establishing and maintaining good quality partnerships in learning and teaching and with suggestions for enhancing the community and culture within which we operate.

Introduction

Student-staff partnership in learning and teaching has gone from being a niche activity to becoming a key priority at many higher education institutions in the UK in the last ten years. It is not a new approach, and indeed, many authors and researchers highlight calls for partnership and shared decision-making that originate in the work of John Dewey, Karl Rogers, Henri Giroux, Michael Apple and other supporters of critical pedagogy and democratic education (Bovill, 2013). Many of the historical calls for student-staff partnership came from schools of education, although in higher education there have been surges of political unrest and calls for students to have more decision-making power, most notably in the late 1960s. The high level of interest may be due in part to the marketization of universities. On the one hand, this leads to a focus on ensuring customer (student) satisfaction, and on the other hand, it creates a model of education that is so antithetical to the

values of many staff working in higher education that they pursue partnership as a way to create a more humane and ethical higher education; an education that supports students' development as critical citizens and highly articulate decision-makers (Cook-Sather & Felten, 2017).

One definition of partnership is "...a collaborative, reciprocal process through which all participants have the opportunity to contribute equally, although not necessarily in the same ways, to curricular or pedagogical conceptualization, decision making, implementation, investigation, or analysis" (Cook-Sather, Bovill & Felten 2014: 6-7). This definition and many other dictionary definitions of partnership imply a level of equality between partners, something which can be challenging to achieve in universities, where staff often have greater power in terms of grading and regulations. Some authors have therefore chosen to use a range of similar terms , such as co-creation, active student participation or students as change agents (Dunne, 2016), which share some characteristics such as shared decision making, shared responsibility, learner empowerment, negotiation and enhanced student agency, but that avoid presumptions about equality that often come with the term partnership. Others have been keen to ensure that partnership is considered not so much as an outcome, but as an aspiration and a set of principles to inform more equitable ways of working that enable greater student agency (Healey et al, 2014; Mercer-Mapstone et al, 2017).

One of the reasons that student-staff partnership in learning and teaching has been gaining attention is due to the growing body of evidence demonstrating compelling positive outcomes from partnership work. Many of the positive outcomes of partnership are shared by staff and students, even if they are experienced in different ways, and they include: enhanced engagement, motivation and learning; deeper meta-cognitive awareness of learning and teaching; a more developed sense of identity; improved classroom and teaching experiences; enhanced student assessment performance; increased trust; enhanced sense of belonging to a university, discipline or community; enhanced student-staff relationships; enhanced student-student relationships; and enhanced student well-being (Cook-Sather, Bovill and Felten, 2014; Hill et al, 2019; Mercer-Mapstone et al, 2017).

The variety of student-staff partnerships in learning and teaching

Student-staff partnerships have taken many forms in different contexts, relating to the: initiator of the partnership (student or staff); focus of partnership (enhancing learning and teaching, building academic community, the needs of particular students, evaluating or researching existing work etc.); context of partnership (curricular, extra-curricular, university-wide); number of students included (small number or whole class of students); type of students included (year of study, undergraduate,

postgraduate, disadvantaged students, the 'super-engaged', retrospective/current/future students – see Bovill, 2014); scale of partnership (within one class, one isolated project, institution-wide; length of partnership (days to years); nature of partnership/student involvement (students informed, consulted, involved, partners or leading); nature of reward or recompense given to students (payment, course credit, vouchers or no payment) (See Bovill, forthcoming a, for a typology to map this variety). I present some examples to help illustrate each of these points.

At the University of Winchester, the Student Fellows Scheme is an institution-wide initiative that funds approximately 60 students per year to work with staff on educational development projects. The Scheme is jointly funded and managed by the Learning and Teaching Development Unit and the Students' Union. Projects can be student-led, where any student at the University can identify an area of interest they wish to research and find a staff member to work with, or staff can propose projects that would benefit from student involvement. The focus of the projects can be learning and teaching or more university-wide issues, such as investigating the needs of commuter students. Student Fellows are paid a bursary during the project which can last up to a year (Lowe et al, 2017).

At Elon University in North Carolina, USA, students are invited to join curriculum planning groups. In one such initiative that focused on an education course, four students who had previously studied the course (retrospective students) and four students who were going to be studying the course (future students) were employed to join two staff from the course and an academic developer from the Center for Learning and Teaching. Unusually for a curriculum planning group, students outnumbered staff. There is a tendency when students are invited to join curriculum planning groups in different universities, that one or two students are invited to join an already established planning group of staff, which has a significant detrimental impact on the likelihood of students feeling enabled to contribute meaningfully. Elon's model of curriculum planning challenges the usual power dynamics in revising the ratio of students to staff, with a resultant positive impact on the nature and extent of partnership that is possible. One of the early tasks the group undertook was to select a new text book for the course using a collaboratively designed assessment rubric. Students and staff read and reviewed a range of possible books, eventually selecting a new text book for the course. The way this task was undertaken enabled students to recognise they were genuine partners in this curriculum planning process (Bovill 2014; Mihans et al, 2008) [1].

[1] Interestingly, many staff consider this kind of curriculum planning committee work to be curricular (pertaining to the curriculum), but many students consider this work to be extra-curricular, as they are undertaking this partnership work outside the requirements of their studies.

At University College Dublin in Ireland, staff in the geography department interviewed and selected three third year students who had previously studied the first year course (retrospective students) to design a new virtual learning environment for the large first year geography course. These students were given a framework by the staff which focused on several case studies including for example, migration to and from Ireland, the siting of an oil pipeline off the coast of Ireland, and the international coffee trade. The students were given relevant resources and the freedom to create materials to support learning about each of these case studies. They created fantastic resources and a highly attractive learning resource for use with the 400 first year students (Bovill 2014; Moore & Gilmartin 2010).

At the University of Edinburgh, staff interviewed and recruited six medical students to co-design teaching resources for a new flipped classroom approach to teaching about physical activity. They selected one student from each year of the medical school, thereby gaining a mix of perspectives from retrospective, current and future students). The students reviewed and selected some existing materials as well as designing new resources, recording interviews and editing all the online resources. The students also evaluated how the wider student body responded to the new resources (Harden and Fawkner, 2019).

In the Maths Department at Loughborough University, two second year students (retrospective students) approached staff to ask if they could help create some resources for first year students focused on difficult concepts that they had struggled to learn. In this altruistic project, the second years did not want other students to struggle the way they had done in first year. The students worked with staff to create new worksheets on difficult concepts for new classes of first year students (Cook-Sather et al, 2014; Duah & Croft, 2011).

Several years ago at the University of St Andrews, a staff member taught an entrepreneurship and business planning course in partnership with his students. He taught for the first two to three weeks of class using fairly standard lectures. During this time, the students were forming into groups and were selecting a topic for their group project that would be assessed at the end of the course. By week three, the teacher then asked the whole class of current students what they would need to learn in the following seven to eight weeks in order for them to be able to succeed in their group projects. The class shared these ideas and then the teacher asked who wanted to take responsibility for investigating which topics and reading which items from the reading list. The students presented this work back to class and ran interactive exercises based on the material for everyone's benefit.

The teacher also asked which topics and readings they would like him to cover. In this way they negotiated, shared responsibility, and co-taught the rest of their course (Cook-Sather et al, 2014).

At the University of Reading, a Classics professor invites all the current students in his class to design their own essay question. The question must incorporate six to eight key words, but the students are encouraged to focus on elements that they are most interested in. The professor checks the questions and sometimes suggests amendments (mainly due to the scope of questions being too narrow or broad in ways that might hinder students). Over the years that he has been doing this, the professor reports improved assessment outcomes for students due to their greater engagement in the assessment task (Cook-Sather et al 2014).

There are many more examples from around the world, but this small selection of examples helps to illustrate some of the wide variation in what is possible in student-staff partnerships. Several of the examples involve a whole class of students while others select a small number of students to be involved. Several examples take place in classrooms, one involves a committee taking place to plan a curriculum, another is an institution-wide scheme funding small projects. Some of the students involved are current students, some are future students about to study a course, others have previously studied a course and return to help develop the curriculum or resources for fellow students. Some of the students are paid, others – predominantly those involved in partnership within their course of study – are not paid. The nature of the partnership is not revealed in any detail in these descriptions, but even with the concise details provided, it is clear that some partnerships are inviting deep engagement and decision-making, others may be enhancing choice and involvement to a limited degree. Similarly, these descriptions do not really give any sense of which students are selected, how and why. These latter points are considered further within an overview of current discourse in higher education about student-staff partnerships.

Current discourse about higher education student-staff partnerships

The current student-staff partnership discourse is reaching a stage in its development where many colleagues are taking stock of how partnership practices have developed over the last ten years, and which directions and developments might come next. Contemporary discourse focuses on a range of challenging issues, namely: theoretical framing for student-staff partnerships; contested conceptualisations; mixed motivations within a neoliberal context; scaling up and sustainability; the imperative of inclusion; and the role of student-staff relationships.

Theoretical framing for student-staff partnerships

In a recent critique, Macfarlane and Tomlinson (2017) argued that much student engagement research and practice is weakly theorised. This led to some disgruntlement among those whose work was connected to student engagement – including those undertaking student-staff partnerships - and scholars whose work appeared to have been disregarded and devalued by this, in many cases, inaccurate generalisation. Matthews et al (2019) recently analysed the frameworks most commonly used in student-staff partnerships. In this work, the authors articulate theorising to be "an active sense-making process moving towards formulating rather than presenting theories of partnership praxis" (Matthews et al, 2019: 283). They found that student-staff partnership work built upon existing constructs (including deliberative democracy, communities of practice; ecology of participation; liminality; participative reality; student engagement and threshold concepts), that imagined partnership through metaphors (including students as partners, student as producer, self-authorship, student voice and translation), and that partnerships drew upon existing constructs (including gender, identity, power and partnership).

The study by Matthews et al (2019) limited its focus to partnership literature and therefore does not include relevant work that uses related terminology but is not described as partnership such as student engagement or co-creation initiatives, for example. It is also worth noting that there is an emphasis in the literature on project-based partnership over curriculum-based partnership (Mercer-Mapstone et al 2017). These factors may have led to some omissions of relevant theoretical frameworks that have been used in broader partnership work. One important omission in theoretical frameworks informing partnership is critical pedagogy. Critical pedagogy has played a significant role in our current understanding of student-staff partnerships, and highlights key conditions for learning in partnership: "that learning is meaningful; that there is freedom for students to make choices; that the student-tutor relationship is facilitatory, collaborative and based on dialogue; and that the learner is viewed as a knowledgeable and critical partner in learning (Bovill, 2013: 99). I have drawn on critical pedagogy within much of my own work (Bovill & Bulley, 2011; Bovill 2013; Bovill 2014) and Buckley (2014) articulates how critical pedagogy can build a bridge between student engagement focused on learning and teaching and student engagement focused on governance.

The accusation that much student engagement work is poorly theorised has led to discussion and research to demonstrate that whilst there are many small scale studies that are not highly theorised,

equally there are many other robust studies that were overlooked in the original critique of the literature by MacFarlane and Tomlinson (2017). The danger with this kind of sweeping generalisation is that it runs the risk of devaluing important student engagement work within universities.

Contested conceptualisations

Dunne (2016) gathered over 20 different terms that are being used to describe student-staff partnership and student engagement work, illustrating the complexity of partnership. This complexity has led authors to create different models and frameworks in attempts to aid understanding. I outline three of the most well used frameworks. Dunne and Zandstra's (2011) *Theoretical model for students as change agents* suggests that differing emphasis is placed on the student voice or on student action, with students either being: evaluators of their HE experience (student voice); participants in decision-making processes; partners, co-creators and experts; or students as agents for change. Healey et al's (2014) *Students as partners in learning and teaching in higher education* model, considers partnership to be focused on either: subject based research and inquiry; scholarship of teaching and learning; learning, teaching and assessment; or curriculum design and pedagogic consultancy. In this model, partnership learning communities are considered to be the heart of student-staff partnership practice. Bovill et al's (2016) *Student roles in co-creation of learning and teaching* model highlights students adopting four different roles in co-creation: representative; consultant; co-researcher; and pedagogical co-designer.

None of these models fully encapsulates all the different elements of the complex, nuanced and varied student-staff partnerships outlined earlier. Yet, the models have been, and continue to be helpful in deepening the debate about partnership. There are many more models and frameworks available, including Bryson et al's (2015) dividing of partnership projects into Model A (small numbers of selected students) and Model B (whole class approaches to partnership). Indeed, further explorations of the benefits of whole class approaches to partnership have been undertaken: notably work by Moore-Cherry et al (2015) based in geography; and work by Bovill (forthcoming) that argues whole class approaches to partnership have been largely overlooked in much of the UK partnership discourse. Another helpful conceptualisation is Buckley's division of student engagement into those initiatives focusing on governance and those focusing on pedagogy. New frameworks continue to be proposed (see for example Martens et al in press) as colleagues strive to understand student-staff partnerships more deeply.

Mixed motivations within a neoliberal context

Earlier in this paper I suggested that the context of a marketised higher education system had led some institutions to realise the value of paying more attention to ensuring students have positive 'customer' experiences, and recognising student engagement and partnership as part of a range of strategies to this end. As Dwyer (2018: 12) noted, partnership "… was often discussed as a product or strategy to ensure the university remained competitive and positioned students as self-interested consumers with little concern for their role within society". In contrast, Waddington (2016) highlights the need for alternatives to overcome 'the compassion gap' in marketised higher education. Many staff and students see enhanced dialogue and working in partnership as ways of countering and challenging the strong instrumental, managerial and customer-focused higher education they experience (Waddington 2016; Wijaya Mulya 2018), with partnership offering an opportunity to move towards more ethical, democratic and humanised universities. This is in some sense a conundrum, that two quite diametrically opposed perspectives can pursue similar goals. However, although both of these perspectives might support partnership, we might expect the values underpinning those partnerships to differ. And yet in a recent study by Mercer-Mapstone and Bovill (forthcoming), many institutional partnership schemes placed value on the processes of partnership, something perhaps surprising in institutions where the emphasis is most frequently on outcomes. We need to ensure that we maintain a focus on enhancing partnership processes, as reimagined learning and teaching processes are responsible for so many of the positive partnership impacts on students, staff and the wider learning environment (Hill et al, 2019). This continued focus on processes can be achieved, for example, through student partnership in inquiry, and resistance to relying solely on narrowly-focused quantitative outcome measures.

Scaling up and Sustainability

The benefits of partnership have led many people to consider how they might scale up partnership work. For some this has been achieved by running institution-level partnership schemes. Indeed some universities have been running partnership schemes involving large numbers of students and staff for nearly ten years now (see for example, Flint & Millard, 2018). Yet in the study by Mercer-Mapstone and Bovill (in press), the research findings demonstrated how some institutional partnership schemes involved quite small numbers of students even though the schemes themselves were open to all students across a university. In contrast, examples where a teacher works in partnership with a whole class of students, as in the examples from St Andrews University and the University of Reading described earlier, could on the surface appear to be isolated micro-level

examples of partnership, but if involving a reasonable number of students, they may be reaching more students than some institution-wide schemes. If two to three teachers in different parts of a university are involved in student-staff partnerships in learning and teaching, this could quickly build into a larger scale version of partnership (Bovill, forthcoming b). If a concerted, co-ordinated approach was taken to supporting and promoting student-staff partnership within the curriculum for all students in a class, this could well increase the impact of partnerships for the benefit of larger numbers of students.

Many people have raised questions about the sustainability of student-staff partnerships in learning and teaching. If a small group of students redesign the curriculum for the next group of students, how long should it be before this course is redesigned again? Is one redesign involving students sufficient? Some of the projects that have employed students, such as the earlier example from University College Dublin, have provided a design that has the potential to last three to four years before it might be thought necessary to redesign again. Many students, even though not involved in the design themselves, have appreciated that the design has involved fellow students, although this co-design mainly benefits the small group of students involved (Cook-Sather et al, 2014). In instances where a teacher works with a whole class of students to co-design learning and teaching, this is a model of partnership that requires redesign with every new group of students. Essentially, this is a pedagogical approach that requires a teacher to build relationships and forge new partnerships with every class (Bovill, forthcoming b). This might be demanding, but many teachers describe it as transformational, and they wouldn't consider returning to former ways of teaching (Bovill, 2014). Running an institutional partnership scheme requires funding for projects and to pay students, a co-ordinator (either employed specifically, or finding time from their main job), vision and energy, in order to maintain momentum. Individual teachers undertaking student-staff partnership in their classes also need time, vision and energy, which often makes it challenging to sustain this approach. All partnership approaches benefit from high level support in the institution, and recognition of the work that goes into making partnerships successful.

The imperative of inclusion

One of the key debates that has been dominating partnership discussions recently is focused on ensuring that student-staff partnership in learning and teaching is inclusive of all students. Many schemes claim to be open to all, but this usually means that no extra thought has been given to how existing institutional structural discrimination will be overcome, running the risk that partnership will exacerbate existing inequalities. Particular concern is focused on partnership that only involves a

small number of students and therefore which requires some form of student selection. It is often the already super-engaged students, those with high grades, or those who have already established good networks with staff, who benefit (Bryson et al, 2015; Dwyer, 2018; Marquis et al, 2018).

While on the surface of things, whole class partnership appears to include all students in a class, significant thought still needs to be given as to how to 'involve' all students in the class so they have equality of opportunity to participate. The ways in which participation can happen in a class must vary so that learning approaches and different work strands appeal to different students. Key here is recognising that contributions may differ as long as there are genuinely meaningful opportunities for all. Extra care is needed to ensure that traditionally excluded groups are enabled to participate, whether through active positive discrimination or through careful attention to changing approaches normally used that enable domination of discussions and activity by privileged individuals and groups (Felten et al, 2013; Marquis et al, 2018). Attention is needed to establish an environment of trust and respect and to raise awareness of what everyone can bring to partnerships. Often there is no single approach to ensure inclusion. Rather, it is by offering a variety of opportunities that appeal to different students and staff, opportunities often co-created by students and staff, which will enable different students and staff to engage. Hill et al (2016), Huxham et al (2015) and Marvell et al (2013) have also drawn attention to the added value of stepping outside classroom spaces in order to change typical pedagogical dynamics and to work in partnership. Indeed, Hill and colleagues argue that 'borderland' spaces can open up new possibilities and enable new forms of participation.

The role of student-staff relationships

Underpinning so much of student-staff partnership practice is the recognition that student-staff relationships are critical. Positive relationships underpin partnership and enable students to feel they belong, encourages engagement at university, and they help learning to become a positive experience. We need to remember however that traditionally, "… individuals are positioned as students and lecturers in such a way that constrains how they may behave in relation to each other …" (Mann 2001:10). This applies not only to lecturers, but to other staff too. Often our universities are structured in ways that are hierarchical and which lead to students remaining subordinate. Yet students can achieve so much more and staff can find work far more rewarding when we recognise the value of students and what they bring to any encounter. Most universities are keen to ensure students develop a range of graduate attributes, but are sometimes more reluctant to acknowledge that many students already bring with them some phenomenal knowledge, skills and attributes. Kuh and Huh (2001) have highlighted the importance of student-staff contact both inside the classroom

and outside the classroom, and there are increasing examples of how universities are establishing different ways of encouraging students and staff to find ways of nurturing more meaningful relationships.

One such example from the University of Edinburgh is the range of different approaches being adopted to encourage students and staff to have coffee and cake together (Bovill 2018; Clarissa, 2019; Horsfall 2019; Taylor & Gribbin 2019). I established the "coffee and cake conversations" scheme at the University of Edinburgh in 2018 with the aim of supporting staff and students to have more human conversations with one another, and to help students to develop a stronger sense of belonging to their School. Along with a colleague in the Institute for Academic Development, we invited staff and students to volunteer to go for free coffee and cake. We had over 100 volunteers from across 15 Schools. We then paired up a volunteer staff member with a volunteer student from the same School and the student was asked to find two friends to join the group. They were then given £25 to go to a coffee shop of their choice. In the end, about 50 students and staff went for coffee and cake (a clash with industrial action affected the number who participated). We asked each group to take a photo of themselves, and then answer some questions, which were intended to help break the ice. Groups were advised to answer as many or as few questions as they wished to. Questions included: What got you interested in the subject you are teaching/studying? Who has been your most inspiring teacher from school, university or elsewhere? What did they do to inspire you? Tell everyone something about yourself that you are happy to share but which they are unlikely to know about you.

What happened next was inspiring. We started receiving unprompted emails from participants. One person said, *"It was brilliant, we don't need any more money but we've all agreed to go out again next week to carry on our conversations"*. We carried out further evaluation and the following comments were typical: *"I found it inspiring - talking to bright young people is one of the best aspects of our job, and increasingly something that there is little time to do ... this was a great opportunity to do so. I came away reminded of what is good about this job!"*; *"I had a lovely time with X, we chatted about a whole range of things from the strikes to our backgrounds and it was really nice to get to know a lecturer".* Following this success, we have supported colleagues in Schools to establish their own coffee and cake conversations initiatives in order to maximise the impact of this approach.

A robust range of evidence exists demonstrating the positive impact of student-teacher interaction inside and outside formal classes in terms of students' positive academic performance, personal and intellectual development, enhanced student satisfaction and motivation (Chickering & Gamson 1987; Cuseo 2007; Komarraju, Musulkin, & Bhattacharya 2010; Kuh & Hu 2001; Lamport, 1993; Lundberg & Schreiner, 2004; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1978; 2005). Many authors have highlighted the key role of positive relationships in learning and teaching as well as more generally on campus for creating a positive welcoming environment. For example, Brookfield (2006) emphasised the importance of staff credibility and authenticity to help build relationships with students, while Long (1977) as well as Theophilides and Terenzini (1981) emphasised the need for staff to be warm and informal, friendly, genuine, respectful, and understanding in order to enhance relationships with students. Importantly, positive relationships are foundational for building partnerships, but are also often the outcome of successful partnerships (Bovill, forthcoming b).

One strong element of building more meaningful relationships is that teachers and students are better placed to respond to emotions. Recent work in geography by Hill et al (2019) highlights the role that student-staff partnerships can play in supporting students to engage with emotion in learning. Hill and colleagues discuss the ways in which partnership working can enable students to deal with emotions in ways that lead to more positive wellbeing. In addition, Marvell and Simm (2018) highlight the role of student-led practice, reflection in action, and responsive pedagogical approaches in dealing with emotions during fieldwork.

Practical strategies for enacting partnership

Although there are many challenges to enacting partnership, such as overcoming resistance from both students and staff, navigating institutional structures and norms, and ensuring that partnerships are inclusive (Bovill et al, 2016), there are a range of ways that can help towards achieving successful partnership working.

One key consideration is to ask what values and principles will underpin your partnership work. Cook-Sather et al (2014) argue that partnerships should emulate the values of shared respect, shared responsibility and reciprocity. Where these values are used as a guide to partnership working, an ethos of trust can be established. Cook-Sather et al (2014) also suggest a range of practical advice to help establish and sustain partnerships: start small; be patient; ensure that participation is voluntary; think carefully about which students to invite if you are not including all

students; create shared aims; cultivate support; and acknowledge that things do not always go right the first time providing an opportunity to learn from your mistakes.

Other practical considerations include finding allies in your university who also wish to pursue partnership or who are already working in partnership with students. Have conversations with these colleagues and learn from one another's practice. Try to align partnership work with other work you and your colleagues are doing, and where possible with university priorities – it can be far easier to gain traction and further support for partnership if your work helps to support other priorities too. Finally, it helps if there is adequate supporting infrastructure, promotion of partnership approaches in academic development fora, and personal development opportunities and recognition for students and staff to engage successfully in partnership (Healey et al, 2014).

Conclusions

There has been a rise in student-staff partnership research and practice in higher education in the last ten years. Yet the range of terminology and frameworks used to inform and explain practice are indicative of the vast variation in the nature of partnerships. This overview does not intend to suggest that any particular approach is better than another, but instead, I encourage you to think about what might be possible in your own working context.

So, what can geographers bring to the debate about partnership? Already, geographers are influencing partnership debates, whether it is about defining partnership (Healey et al, 2014), inviting students to become partners in research (Healey & Jenkins 2009) exploring the spaces and processes of partnership (Hill et al, 2016), dealing with emotions positively through partnerships (Hill et al, 2019; Marvell & Simm 2018) or proposing ways of overcoming challenges to ensure partnership is inclusive (Bovill et al 2016; Moore-Cherry et al, 2015). Geographers have a good deal to offer in deepening our understanding of student-staff partnerships in learning and teaching, whether it is from the wide range of contexts within which you practice and research, the scale of your work or the different roles students adopt within your partnerships. Geographers have a range of tools and approaches that could aid wider understanding of partnerships: whether it is mapping networks; understanding complex social constructions; or supporting interdisciplinary thinking and working to support institutional change. How can you support and extend the debates I have presented in this paper? What areas of partnership can you identify, which need further inquiry? What do geography students consider to be areas of partnership practice that would benefit from further investigation?

Paying attention to your motivations for working in partnership and to the values and principles underpinning your work can enhance your chances of success and of being open with students about your intentions. Student-staff partnerships in learning and teaching are one way of moving towards a more human, relational higher education. Our practices might not be perfect, but if we continue to be constructively critical of own and others' practice, we can continue to extend our understandings as well as the benefits of partnership. Evaluate your practice and share your findings with the wider learning and teaching community – we have a good deal to learn from one another.

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